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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[11. Mideast](#)

[12. Iran-Britain Crisis](#)

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that PM Ehud Olmert, at a press conference on Sunday evening in Jerusalem with German Chancellor Angela Merkel,

proposed a "meeting of all the heads of the Arab states, including -- obviously -- the Saudi King, whom I see as a very important leader, to have discussions with us." On Sunday Ha'aretz quoted Olmert as saying in an interview with TIME Magazine: "I can tell you that if I had had an opportunity to meet with King Abdullah of the Saudis -- which I have not -- he would be very surprised to hear what I have to say. I look very favorably at the active role Saudis are now playing in the Middle East for many years." Olmert called the Saudi peace initiative "a very interesting approach." When pressed by interviewer Joe Klein to elaborate on what would surprise Abdullah, Olmert responded coyly, "If he reads about it in TIME, he wouldn't be surprised." Today The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel was unfazed by some of the immediate negative Arab responses to Olmert's call for a regional summit, with senior diplomatic officials saying Tuesday night that efforts to push for such a conference would continue.

On Monday Ha'aretz reported that, on her penultimate visit to Jerusalem six weeks ago, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice discovered upon her arrival that Olmert had informed the media about his telephone conversation with Bush the previous day. "The Prime Minister and President see eye-to-eye," said a high ranking political official in Jerusalem. Ha'aretz said that the message was unmistakable: What Rice had to say barely mattered. Olmert had it all worked out with the President. Rice did not like it, but proceeded according to plan in convening the triple summit in Jerusalem with Olmert and Abbas. The summit came and went with no real effect. Ha'aretz said that Olmert behaved similarly during the Secretary's subsequent visits.

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Ha'aretz and other media reported that on Tuesday Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa announced that the foreign ministers of

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10 Arab states will meet in Cairo in two weeks to call on Israel to accept the peace initiative approved at the Arab League summit in Riyadh last week. Moussa was quoted as saying that the foreign ministers "will call on the government of Israel and on all Israelis to accept the Arab peace initiative and use the existing opportunity to renew the direct negotiations." The 10 countries that will be represented are members of the Committee for Furthering the Arab Peace Initiative. Moussa heads the committee, which includes Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Syria, Lebanon, Qatar, Tunisia, Bahrain and the PLO. Yediot reported that Olmert's conciliatory remarks in Passover interviews he granted Israeli dailies were not received well among the Saudi leadership. Yediot quoted a senior Saudi official as saying on Tuesday: "Olmert's remarks are an attempt to modify the Arab peace initiative. Olmert is talking about a public meeting that does not offer anything, just a 'willingness to listen' on his part. The Arab peace plan clearly talks about an equation: Israeli assent to a full withdrawal for the occupied territories in exchange for full peace." The official was quoted as saying that Olmert seeks normalization without committing himself to concessions. Yediot quoted other Saudi official as saying that Olmert's declaration that peace could be reached in five years means that "Israel is postponing the talks by a few years and refuses to adopt the Arab plan."

Yediot quoted State Department Sean McCormack as saying on Monday: "We believe that it could be positive to have an interaction between the Israelis as well as potential Arab partners because ultimately if you're going to bring peace to the region you need to have that reconciliation between Arab states and Israel.... How exactly they use this potential opening is going to be up to them. We encourage them to explore the possibilities." Yediot quoted McCormack as saying that he expects that Rice will be going back out to the Middle East probably some time in May but that "we don't have a date set yet."

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that the Prime Minister's Office expressed its displeasure on Saturday over an EU decision to meet with a number of moderate non-Hamas ministers in the PA's new unity government. Today Israel Radio reported that Norway has requested that the EU recognize the new Palestinian government.

On Monday Ha'aretz and Yediot led with reports that Israel has

delivered a calming message to Syria and that it has no plans to attack its northern neighbor. According to information Israel received, the Syrians are concerned that the US will carry out an attack against Iran's nuclear installations in the summer, and in parallel Israel would strike Syria and Lebanon. On Monday The Jerusalem Post reported that IDF Intelligence head Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin told the cabinet on Sunday that Iran, Syria, and Hizbullah are preparing their defense for a war in the summer and that they are more worried by an attack by the US than from Israel.

Ha'aretz reported that Palestinian sources told the newspaper on Tuesday that Egypt is considering intensifying its cooperation with Israel in countering the smuggling of arms from Sinai to the Gaza Strip. The Egyptians will also cooperate on intelligence in tracking down Palestinian fugitives who reach the Sinai side of the Rafah crossing. During the weekend, senior delegations from Israel, Egypt, the US, and the PA met in Cairo. The meeting was chaired by US Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton, the security coordinator between Israel and the Palestinians. Representing Israel at the meeting was Amos Gilad, the head of the political-defense department at the Ministry of Defense. The Palestinians were represented by the head of Internal Security, Rashid Abu Shbakh. Egypt's chief of intelligence, Omar Suleiman, did not attend, but his aides were present. Ha'aretz quoted the sources as saying that the meeting was positive, but that criticism was directed at the level of Egyptian involvement to date.

Special focus was given to Egypt's unsatisfactory activities in countering the smuggling of arms to the Gaza Strip through tunnels running under the border area with Sinai. The Egyptians were also asked to broaden their efforts in countering cells of extremist Islamic groups that have set up bases there. Ha'aretz also reported that four months ago Jordan transferred to the Palestinian security forces -- units answerable to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas -- a total of 3,000 M-16 rifles. At the same time, Egypt delivered 2,500 AK-47 rifles to Abbas loyalists through the Rafah crossing. In total, Egypt and Jordan also delivered more than 3 million bullets for the rifles. Ha'aretz wrote that Abbas recently asked the Israelis and Americans to agree to the transfer of more weapons from Arab countries to his forces, both in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. However, Israel and the US rejected the request.

Israel Radio reported that US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is meeting this morning with Syria's President Bashar Assad in Damascus. Major media quoted Pelosi as saying that it was "an excellent idea" to lead a Congressional delegation for talks with the Syrian leadership. She was responding to President Bush's criticism of her visit to Syria. Pelosi was also quoted as saying that she will discuss the US-Syrian relationship, Damascus' support to rejectionist Palestinian groups, and the situation in Iraq with Assad. Leading media reported that, during her visit to Israel earlier this week, she promised to raise the issue of the kidnapped IDF soldiers with Assad.

The Jerusalem Post reported that PA officials have accused German Chancellor Angela Merkel of "offending the Palestinians' feelings" during her visit earlier this week to Ramallah, where she met with Abbas. The accusations, the first of their kind against a European leader, were made by top PA officials only hours after Merkel and her entourage left Ramallah on Monday. "She did everything to provoke the Palestinians during her visit," one official was quoted as saying. "She showed no understanding for the plight of our people. On the other hand, she appeared to be very biased toward Israel." The official claimed that while Merkel refused to meet with families of Palestinian prisoners held in Israel, she focused during her talks with Abbas on the need to release kidnapped IDF Cpl. Gilad Shalit, who has been held in the Gaza Strip since last June. In addition, he noted, Merkel met with the families of missing IDF soldiers during her visit to Jerusalem.

Israel Radio reported that an IDF soldier was moderately wounded in Jenin. Ha'aretz and the radio reported that on Tuesday a Fatah militant was seriously injured by IDF troops in Nablus.

Ha'aretz reported that the defense establishment is currently considering to abandon the plan to include bulges in the separation fence, aimed at keeping major settlements blocks such as Ariel, Immanuel, and Kedumim within the Israeli side of the divide. Officials are considering an alternative plan, which proposes to

seal the fence near the settlements of Elkana and Beit Aryeh. The proposal includes the construction of a new parameter fence around the settlements, which would be left on the Palestinian side of the fence.

Yediot and Israel Radio reported that the operational fitness of 20 percent of the IDF's reserve troops is low.

All media (banner in Maariv) reported that on Tuesday British PM Tony Blair warned that Britain will take a tougher stance vis-a-vis Iran if there is no progress in the efforts to release the abducted British sailors and navy personnel.

Hatzofe reported that Fatah is reorganizing its armed branches into one body -- Al-Asifa (The Storm). Hatzofe also quoted Said Siam, former PA interior minister (Hamas) Siad Siam as saying in Algeria that Hamas will not dismantle its "operational force."

Leading media reported that on Monday the High Court of Justice released a conditional order to the Winograd Commission probing the Second Lebanon War, requiring the committee to explain within eight days why it will not publish the testimonies of Olmert, Defense Minister Amir Peretz and former IDF chief of staff Dan Halutz before the release of its interim report. In addition, the court ordered the commission to explain why it will not publish a predetermined schedule for the release of the minutes of all the discussions and testimonies it heard. The court order was issued following a petition by Meretz MK Zahava Gal-On, filed after the committee informed the High Court of Justice on Sunday that it will not release any more transcripts of witness testimonies on the Second Lebanon War and said it will resume deliberations on the matter only after issuing its interim report, due later this month. This was in violation of the committee's agreement with the High Court, requiring it to publish the testimonies before the Passover holiday.

Maariv reported that the state prosecutor's office is considering indicting senior officials at the Dimona nuclear reactor for receiving millions of shekels in bribes from suppliers.

Ha'aretz and Yediot reported that American billionaire Sheldon Adelson donated USD 25 million to Taglit - birthright israel, a program that offers young Jews aged 18-26 an opportunity to Israel for free. The Jerusalem Post reported that the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces raised a record USD 18 million at its annual gala dinner held last week in New York City. Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz, who heads the strategic dialogue with the US, addressed more than 1,300 attendees and remarked on the key security challenges facing Israel. Mofaz warned that Iran intended to carry out its threats to destroy Israel.

The Jerusalem Post cited a new book by historian and biographer of President Kennedy Robert Dallek -- "Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power" -- that reveals that former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger initially kept the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War a secret from then-President Richard Nixon.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported: "Intel's Israelis Work to Rescue Company From Profit Plunge."

Ha'aretz presented the results of The Aviv University's Peace Index poll conducted among Israelis on March 26-27: About half the Jewish Israeli public had thought that the Arab peace initiative could at least serve as a basis for negotiations on a regional peace agreement. The other half thought the proposal should be rejected out of hand. Among those who had heard of the proposal -- nearly two-thirds of the public -- there is a clear majority of supporters for responding to the Arab initiative, while among those who had not heard of it, a majority opposes responding. At the same time, an overwhelming majority, cutting across the political camps, says that in light of the current unstable status of the Olmert government, it cannot enter negotiations on a comprehensive peace settlement. In the Israeli Arab public, fewer had heard of the Arab peace proposal (56 percent vs. 44 percent who had not heard of it). However, after the main points of the plan were presented to them, there was near-unanimity -- 92 percent -- that this proposal offers a basis for negotiations on a comprehensive peace agreement.

11. Mideast:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "It can ... be surmised that the Saudis are, at best, unsure about whether the regional winds are blowing in favor of Iran or the US, and are, as usual, hedging their bets."

Contributor Zeev Tzahor wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The Saudi initiative now offers the Middle East a new, rare opportunity, and the Israeli leadership is once again facing an historic test."

Prof. Uzi Arad, the Director of the Institute for Policy and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Center, who was a senior advisor to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "A different Israeli approach was required from the very beginning -- one that ... includes no short-lived appeasement and focuses on Israel's interests, not on sacrificing them".

Senior columnist Haggai Huberman wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe: "Decisions made last Saturday by the foreign ministers of the European Union have again exposed Israel's isolation vis-a-vis the Hamas government."

Senior military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Putin's Russia is returning to playing its dirty game in the Middle East."

Block Quotes:

II. "Olmert's Serious Proposal"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (4/4): "The real impediment to [holding meetings between Prime Minister Olmert and Arab leaders] is an evident Saudi decision not to go beyond the absolute minimum gesture toward peace with Israel. The Saudis could have attempted to reissue their original plan, before negative elements were introduced by Syria at the 2002 Beirut summit. They could have endorsed a 4-plus-4-plus-2 meeting. They could have taken some baby steps toward normalization with Israel. They did none of these things. From this we may conclude that the Saudis are not seriously interested in achieving peace, as opposed to looking like they want peace. It can also be surmised that the Saudis are, at best, unsure about whether the regional winds are blowing in favor of Iran or the US, and are, as usual, hedging their bets. The upshot is that so long as it is unclear whether the US will beat a hasty retreat from Iraq or whether Iran will succeed in its race to nuclearize, the Arab states will not materially soften their stance toward Israel. This should be kept in mind by those who think these three arenas can be separated, or see the pursuit of Arab-Israeli peace as the primary means of isolating Iran."

II. "Between Golda and Olmert"

Contributor Zeev Tzahor wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (4/1): "The validity of historical comparisons is limited, but there is nevertheless a fascinating degree of similarity between the Egyptian initiative a generation ago and the Saudi initiative at present. Like then, the top tiers of our leadership are comprised of people with scant political vision, the government is dependent on parties with narrow interests, there is a significant disparity between the bragging done by the army's commanders and the IDF's real readiness for war. Today too the ethos of controlling the occupied territories is stronger than the bill of human rights.... When put to the test of leadership, Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan's staunch opposition resulted in the failure of the Egyptian initiative. From there it was a short distance to the Yom Kippur War. [Then Secretary of State William] Rogers and [former Israeli prime minister David] Ben-Gurion [who favored talks with Egypt] were not alone in their generation. A glance at the newspapers from those days shows that many Israelis understood that the Egyptian initiative provided an opportunity to establish peace

between Israel and Egypt, and that rejecting it would lead to war. But a study of history will teach you that the blindness of the leader who heads the march of folly to war is a far more common spectacle than the appearance of a sober captain who is capable of identifying political options and of leading to a breakthrough that results in peace. Golda and Dayan were among the blind, and even the great Ben-Gurion failed to open their eyes. The Saudi initiative now offers the Middle East a new, rare opportunity, and the Israeli leadership is once again facing an historic test."

III. "The March of Folly Concessions"

Prof. Uzi Arad, the Director of the Institute for Policy and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Center, who was a senior advisor to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in *Yediot Aharonot* (4/4): "When you hear the Prime Minister optimistically predict a peace agreement in a short amount of time, be aware that further diplomatic yielding is near at hand.... How can it be that, while the Arabs and Palestinians adhere to their stances and even up the ante, Israel leaps from initiative to initiative -- defining yesterday's as essential?.... With its positions, the current Palestinian government takes us back to the pre-Oslo days. The meaning of Palestinian-Israeli demands, which join up with external ones, is not the end of the conflict but the end of the Jewish state. This is not how peace is built. A different Israeli approach was required from the very beginning -- one that ... includes no short-lived appeasement and focuses on Israel's interests, not on sacrificing them."

IV. "Israel's Isolation"

Senior columnist Haggai Huberman wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox *Hatzofe* (4/4): "Decisions made last Saturday by the foreign ministers of the European Union have again exposed Israel's isolation vis-a-vis the Hamas government. The decisions were based on four principles, two of which are uncomfortable for Israel. The main decision concerns holding contacts with ministers who do not belong to Hamas -- something that Israel rejects entirely.... Another EU decision is uneasy for Israel -- the recognition of the Arab initiative. Olmert is prepared to discuss the Saudi initiative. Europe accepts the Arab initiative, which is the Saudi initiative plus the right of return [for Palestinian refugees]. Only on one point is there identity between the Israeli position and those of Europe and the United States: The direct connection will be with Abu Mazen, not with the Hamas government."

IV. "Russia is Warmongering Again"

Senior military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist *Yediot Aharonot* (4/2): "Putin's Russia is returning to playing its dirty game in the Middle East. As always, the Russians have no problem heating up sectors and setting fires just in order to screw over the Americans and gain a foothold in the region once again. The Syrian delegations that have recently been making frequent trips to Moscow do not go there just for acquisitions. They undergo brainwashing there. The Russians are persuading the Syrians that the US will attack Iran in the summer, whereas a second front will be opened against Syria at the same time: An American-Israeli [front].... The Russian hypothesis about an American-Israeli war on two fronts falls on willing Syrian ears... The situation is highly volatile. It would be enough for somebody to misunderstand the intentions of his rival for fighting to flare up on Israel's northern border. It is true that war will not serve the interests of any of the parties, but with such a quantity of fuel in the air, and pyromaniacs from Moscow playing with matches, things could get out of control."

¶2. Iran-Britain Crisis:

Summary:

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in the conservative, independent *Jerusalem Post*: "From the Iranian side, of course, humiliation of the West is precisely the goal."

Intelligence affairs correspondent Yossi Melman wrote in the independent, left-leaning *Ha'aretz*: "Whoever wishes to force Iran to back away from its nuclear program should further tighten the economic blockade on it."

Block Quotes:

II. "Once Britain Ruled the Waves. Now Iran Does"

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in the conservative, independent *Jerusalem Post* (4/4): "If in, say 1807 or 1907, an Iranian ruler had dared trample unbidden on the decks of one of his or her majesty's ships -- he would have been made to feel very sorry about it.... This era is long gone, and to a large extent that is a good thing. But perhaps the pendulum has swung too far into a failure to appreciate that power and force are often required, especially against 'haughty tyrants,' an apt description of Iran's rulers.... What is this latest incident in retaliation for? The mutilation of a sea captain, or murder of a merchant on his way to appreciate the beauties of a Japanese temple? No, the British navy personnel were taken hostage in retaliation for the arrest of Iranian government-sponsored terrorists caught in the act in Iraq. From the Iranian side, of course, humiliation of the West is precisely the goal. Iran is not, moreover, striving for equality, but superiority for its own side.... In contrast, the West seeks to prove that it is nice. It seeks to apologize, to make reparations, to act as the weaker party. But, you see, the West is running the equivalent of a school for Middle Eastern politicians, intellectuals and revolutionaries. And the lesson it is teaching them is: You are strong and we are weak; you have ideas to believe in, we merely seek maximum comfort and expediency; if you hit us we will yield or look the other way; we are ready to confess our wrongdoing, you only speak of your being absolutely in the right. Like good students, they follow what they are being taught."

III. "The Hidden Soldiers"

Intelligence affairs correspondent Yossi Melman wrote in the independent, left-leaning *Ha'aretz* (4/4): "Western logic is not necessarily Iranian logic. In capturing the British soldiers, in refusing to release them and in deciding to bring them to trial, Iran is seeking to signal to the world that it is determined to continue to advance its nuclear program, and not give in to international pressures, and to act resolutely against anyone who tries to harm it. Nonetheless, it is also possible the case of the British soldiers reflects the power struggles that have been waging for many months in the top echelon of the Iranian government.... In its refusal to accede to the UN Security Council's demand to suspend its uranium enrichment activity, Iran is ostensibly trying to show the world that the sanctions imposed on it are not weakening its hand. But Iran's moves attest to panic and weakness more than strength.... These sanctions are mainly driven by secret activity by the US Department of Treasury, designed to pressure companies in the US, Europe, and Asia to refrain from commercial ties with Iran, or at least to reduce them.... The Bush administration is keeping pressure on the world's governments to cut back their commercial relations with Iran.... The boycott -- both the overt one and mainly

the hidden one -- is intended to strike at the 'soft underbelly' of Iran's economy: the oil and gas industries, which provide 80 percent of the state's revenues.... When the supreme leader realizes that Ahmadinejad's policy threatens the regime's survival, he will have to exercise his influence and authority, even at the price of painful concessions. The continued existence of Iran as an Islamic republic is the highest imperative guiding Khamenei. Whoever wishes to force Iran to back away from its nuclear program should further tighten the economic blockade on it."

JONES